

Review of Rutledge, S. H. (2012). Ancient Rome as a museum: power, identity, and the culture of collecting. Oxford studies in ancient culture and representation. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Spencer, Diana

DOI:

[10.1017/S0075435814000215](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075435814000215)

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Document Version

Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Spencer, D 2014, 'Review of Rutledge, S. H. (2012). Ancient Rome as a museum: power, identity, and the culture of collecting. Oxford studies in ancient culture and representation. Oxford: Oxford University Press.', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 104, pp. 253-255. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075435814000215>

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Eligibility checked in September 2014

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Review

S. H. RUTLEDGE, *ANCIENT ROME AS A MUSEUM: POWER, IDENTITY, AND THE CULTURE OF COLLECTING*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp. xxiv + 395, illus. ISBN 9780199573233. £85.00.

Rome's ability to embody key figures and ideological agenda in its urban fabric was already a truism in classical antiquity. As Steven H. Rutledge observes of Romulus' reification: 'there was, then, a biographical sketch of the birth, life, and death of the founder that left its mark on the city' (167). Moreover, since 'individual cultural objects are tantamount to utterances, their collective narrative legible as text' (223), modern 'readers' do well to understand the relationship between collective polyphony and individual narrative agenda that fashions our glimpses of cosmopolitan Rome.

R. commences engagingly with a museological *mise-en-scène* taking us to Washington DC's National Mall. There, we meet with 'an almost wilful incoherence' (2); yet one which quickly demonstrates the power of the random and its ability to map shifting patterns of dominance and resistance amongst a culture or a people (3). Interrogating the bewildering array of possible interpretative strategies to which this approach sensitizes readers is a challenging task, and that R.'s book derives from successive iterations of a course (taught at the University of Maryland) is, I suspect, part of its strength. A work tackling the multifarious question of 'what was it like to experience the city from a visual and cultural perspective in antiquity? And [then asking] what were the deeper social and cultural implications of that experience?' (vii) demands a particular brand of lucidity married to copious evidence (headlined at 13–15). R.'s book has both, in spades.

R.'s chapter titles waymark the volume neatly. Recommencing in ch. 2 (31–77) we move experientially through the underpinnings of R.'s introductory questions. First, 'Collecting and Acquisition' leads us through the symbolic, ideological, and aesthetic agenda that saw Greek and other imports packed off to Rome. R. treads lightly but effectively through the complexities of the rôle of the 'other' in Roman culture, speaking to changing models of cultural capital vested in the display of art and other artefacts in various contexts across the city. There is already a significant bibliography on what ch. 3 calls 'Viewing, Appreciating, Understanding' (79–121), and R. acknowledges some big guns. Missing, however (also from R.'s bibliography (315–37)), are a couple of key works on the experience and comprehension of how works of art are comprehended (E. W. Leach, *The Social Life of Painting in Ancient Rome and on the Bay of Naples* (2004); T. M. O'Sullivan, *Walking in Roman Culture* (2011)). This chapter is nevertheless important: 'a starting point for the remainder of the work' (79). R. rightly warns against uncomplicated assumptions based on élite responses, yet sees how they can reveal at least a partial 'understanding of visual culture ... as a point of consensus and integration within the community' (80). Whatever the readings available, the public situation and definition of artefacts as 'culture' or 'art' creates at the very least a viewing public. Mimesis (implicitly central to 93–102) and the rôle of *imagines* (e.g. 105–10, and *passim*) lead elegantly to ch. 4's concern with 'Displaying Domination: Spoils, War Commemoratives, and Competition' (123–57). *Protagonismo* meant that the power to command and display spoils developed Rome into 'a vast political pamphlet in which cultural artefacts became a part of the argument over claims to political power and prestige' (124).

Ch. 5, 'Constructing Social Identity: *Pietas*, Women, and the Roman House' (159–92). Something of a portmanteau chapter, this delivers an important counterpoint to the masculine emphasis of R.'s opening manoeuvres. 'Memorabilia' (159) is a useful term here, linking the public/private overlap characteristic of Roman 'domesticity'. The relationship between 'house' (in its various English senses) and *familia* is explored from complementary angles, illuminating the rôle of *pietas* as a mediating factor for explorers interested in the gendering of cultural experience. From 'the élite Roman powerhouse' at the heart of the community (186–92), ch. 6 takes us to 'the Monster and the Map' (193–219). This is R. in territory influentially explored by J. S. Romm (*The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought* (1992)), and recently given Roman focus in a series of important

studies of the Elder Pliny (A. Doody, *Pliny's Encyclopedia: The Reception of the Natural History* (2010), might productively have been fed in). Rome's absorption (and regurgitated repackaging) of the world for internal and external consumption is enormously important; hence, R.'s reading of all sorts of groupings and juxtapositions of objects, spaces, and schematic representations as variant modes of mapping is crucial. Chs 7 and 8 tackle cultural collections from epistemological and ontological perspectives. First, 'Imperial Collections and the Narrative of the *Princeps*' (221–86) extensively catalogues the public collections of Caesar (226–35) and Augustus (235–66, taking in the rôle of 'Augustus' as cultural artefact; lingering productively at his Palatine, Forum, and Portico of Octavia), before zipping from Tiberius to the Flavians (266–84).

In R.'s final substantial chapter we see the flip-side: the value of ancient sites and artefacts as powerful guarantors of permanence, yet also as indicators of tension between individuals and between individuals and central authority when it came to managing their 'Access and Upkeep' (287–309). Understanding the 'responsibility, financing, and oversight' (288–95) for new-builds could easily occupy a book-length study, and similarly, R. can only give a flavour of the issues surrounding 'restoration of artefacts and monuments' and their 'general upkeep, access, and security' (295–308). The substantial outlay that major collections entailed at the outset and in perpetuity, willy nilly, becomes especially important for R.'s brief ch. 9 ('Epilogue', 311–14). What might have seemed likely to trigger a poignant reflection on a period of post-classical decay is used productively to remind readers that spoliation is itself part of the same transformative process: 'the re-emergence of Rome as the centre of another world empire, that of the Church, has arguably had the result that the modern city now reflects, in a living sense, the ancient' (313). Inevitably framed through a series of artificial categories, R.'s fine study richly achieves his aim, illustrating 'how a variety of cultural property was expressive of Roman values and identity' (313).

University of Birmingham

D.J.Spencer@bham.ac.uk

doi:10.1017/S0075435814000215

DIANA SPENCER QI